

10. What do make of the fact that Wilson dons a headscarf. What are her reasons? What does the headscarf mean to her?

11. How does Wilson defend Islam's patriarchal attitude toward women? What does she find comforting?

12. Follow-up to Question 11: Wilson says at one point that a woman in the Middle East "is far less free than a woman in the West, but far more appreciated. When people wonder why Arab women defend their culture, they focus on the way women who don't follow the rules are punished, and fail to consider the way women who do follow the rule are appreciated." Do you think her point is valid?

13. What new insights into the Middle East, Muslims, and Islamic life does Wilson present? Has reading this book altered your views of Islam? In what way does the book challenge the stereotypes portrayed by the media?

14. Do you feel this is a book that those in government—or anyone involved with foreign relations—should read?

15. What is the significance of the book's title?

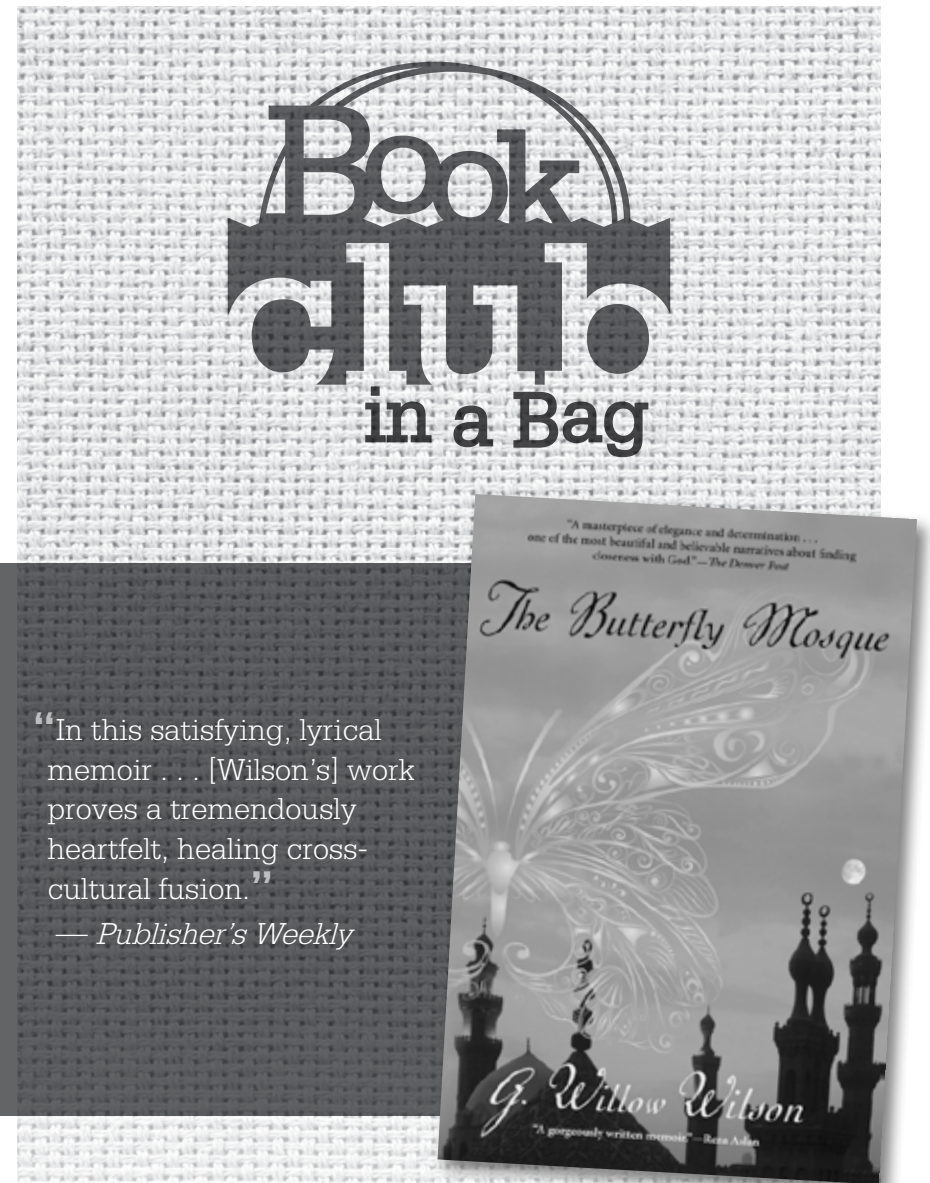
Discussion Questions

"In this satisfying, lyrical memoir . . . [Wilson's] work proves a tremendously heartfelt, healing cross-cultural fusion."
— *Publisher's Weekly*



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Willow Wilson was born in New Jersey in 1982. After graduating with a degree in History and coursework in Arabic language and literature, Willow moved to Cairo, where she became contributor to the Egyptian opposition weekly Cairo Magazine until it closed in 2005.

She is a convert to Islam and her commentary often addresses Islamic and interfaith issues. An avid supporter of new and alternative media, Willow has also written for politics and culture blogs from across the political spectrum.

Book Summary

The extraordinary story of an all-American girl's conversion to Islam and her ensuing romance with a young Egyptian man, *The Butterfly Mosque* is a stunning articulation of a Westerner embracing the Muslim world.

When G. Willow Wilson—already an accomplished writer on modern religion and the Middle East at just twenty-seven—leaves her atheist parents in Denver to study at Boston University, she enrolls in an Islamic Studies course that leads to her shocking conversion to Islam and sends her on a fated journey across continents and into an uncertain future.

She settles in Cairo where she teaches English and submerges herself in a culture based on her adopted religion. And then she meets Omar, a passionate young man with a mild resentment of the Western influences in his homeland. They fall in love, entering into a daring relationship that calls into question the very nature of family, belief, and tradition. Torn between the secular West and Muslim East, Willow records her intensely personal struggle to forge a “third culture” that might accommodate her own values without compromising the friends and family on both sides of the divide.

Discussion Questions

1. What first drew G. Willow Wilson to Islam? What explanation does she offer for her conversion, and does it satisfy you? In what way did her religious, or non-religious, background influence her decision to convert?
2. Comment on this passage from the book: “Religion was taboo in my family, and Islam was taboo in my society—these pressures are not easily shaken off, and I sometimes felt as guilty as if I had committed a crime.” What precisely makes her feel guilty?
3. What are the challenges she has faced, particularly after 9/11, in accepting Islam as her faith?
4. What distinctions does Wilson make between fundamental Islam and “true” Islam? She says that Islam is an “antiauthoritarian sex-positive faith.” Did you disagree at the outset of the book...and did you change your mind by the book's end? Or not.
5. Discuss Wilson's struggles to reconcile Egyptian culture, once she has moved to Egypt, with her own values and expectations.
6. How easy would you find it to integrate yourself into another culture, especially one so very different from Western culture as Egypt's?
7. Do you agree—or disagree—with this statement by Wilson: “Cultural habits are by and large irrational, emerge irrationally, and are practiced irrationally. They are independent of the intellect, and trying to fit them into a logical pattern is fruitless; they can be respected or discarded, but not debated.... Culture belongs to the imagination; to judge it rationally is to misunderstand its function.”
8. Talk about her condemnation of American and Canadian behavior she witnesses in the marketplace. What most disturbs her about their behavior? Do you think she over-generalizes...or makes an astute observation? As a Westerner, how do her criticisms make you feel?
9. Discuss Wilson's anxieties on becoming engaged to Omar, especially when she writes that she “was terrified. There are few things more overwhelming than love in hostile territory.”